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U.S. Swaps Spy for 8 Ghanians Who Aided CIA

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WASHINGTON—A Ghanaian national accused of obtaining U.S. secrets from a CIA clerk who was his lover is being swapped for eight residents of that country who reportedly aided the CIA, law enforcement officials said Monday.

The officials said that Michael A. Soussoudis, 39, a cousin of Lt. Jerry Rawlings, the military leader of Ghana, pleaded no contest to two counts under the espionage act during closed proceedings last week in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va.

He was sentenced Monday to 20 years in prison—with the term reduced to time served—and was turned over to Ghanaian Ambassador Eric Otoo on condition he promptly leave the country.

Flown to African Country

In return, eight Ghanians described by officials as "of interest to the United States" are being flown along with their families to an unidentified African country, U.S. officials said. The eight are CIA "assets" whose identities were revealed to Soussoudis by Sharon M. Scranage, a CIA clerk who served at the U.S. Embassy in Accra, Ghana.

Soussoudis and Scranage, 30, were arrested last July after U.S. investigators became suspicious of her activities upon her return from Ghana. Federal officials charged that she gave Soussoudis CIA data at the request of Rawlings and other Ghanaian officials, including the chief of the country's intelligence service.

After her arrest and firing by the CIA, Scranage cooperated with U.S. investigators and was said to

have helped entice Soussoudis to a hotel in suburban Virginia, where he was arrested.

She pleaded guilty to one count of revealing classified information and two counts of disclosing names of persons working for the CIA. U.S. District Judge Richard L. Williams on Monday sentenced her to five years in prison, with eligibility for parole in 18 months.

At the sentencing, defense lawyer Brian P. Gettings argued that she was entitled to some leniency because the CIA had failed its duty "to protect her from the other side."

Gettings contended that "none of this would have happened" if the CIA had fully warned Scranage when the agency first may have suspected she was the target of Ghanaian intelligence.

But Assistant U.S. Atty. Justin Williams, while acknowledging that Scranage helped U.S. authorities break up the plot, argued that she still should receive a "substantial" prison term for making "grievous disclosures" of classified information.

Extensive Training Cited

He also said that she had undergone considerable CIA training on how to protect herself against intelligence operations in a hostile country before she was assigned to Ghana in 1983.

Judge Williams, in passing the sentence, said it was important that "the message go out . . . there will be swift and certain punishment, no matter what your emotional problems, no matter what your character flaws."

Scranage faced a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison and \$110,000 in fines. Her sentence also requires her to go on probation for two years and perform 1,000 hours of community service work after release from prison.

In 40 minutes of sometimes-tearful testimony, Scranage admitted that she had fallen in love with Soussoudis after she had volunteered for the assignment in Ghana in the wake of a failed marriage in the United States. She described her lonely life in Accra and contrasted it with Soussoudis' luxurious residence.

Scranage said that she had told the CIA station chief in Ghana—whom she did not identify—that she was seeing Soussoudis but was instructed only "to be careful."

Urged to 'Break Off'

In November, 1983, she said, the station chief told her that Ghanaian officials had complained that someone who fit her description was holding "secret meetings" with Ghanaian citizens. She was advised to "gradually break off" with Soussoudis, she said.

Judge Williams said that he would take into consideration Scranage's contention that the CIA "may have been loose" in its operation in Ghana.

Law enforcement officials would not disclose the identities of the eight Ghanians released under the swap. But news accounts from Ghana identified four persons who had been convicted of spying for the CIA.

They are: Felix Peasah, a U.S. Embassy security officer; Theodore Atiedu, a police inspector for Ghana's Bureau of National Investigation; Stephen Balfour Ofose-Addo, a former chief superintendent of police, and Robert Yaw Appiah, a technician with the Ghanaian Post and Telecommunications Corp.